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The Metropolitan Police: alienation, culture, and relations with London's Caribbean Community (1950-1970)

James Whitfield

1 The Macpherson Inquiry Report into the death of Stephen Lawrence, which concluded that the Metropolitan Police Service [the Met] was institutionally racist, has been one of a number of investigations since the mid-1970s to examine why it was that relations between London's police and its Caribbean community had either broken down, or had become characterised by mistrust and resentment. Others had followed the outbreak of serious disorder at the Notting Hill Carnival in 1976; the Brixton riots of 1981; and rioting at Tottenham in 1985. These events aroused considerable academic interest, much of it among sociologists and social scientists, who variously concluded that racist attitudes among police officers lay at the heart of the problem[2], and that, as a result, West Indians and their descendants were stereotyped by police as alienated deviants, possessed of violent criminal tendencies[3]. More recent studies have tended to take these events as the starting point for considerations of relations between police and Black and Asian people, referring only briefly, and in general terms, to the period prior to the 1970s[4].

2 Such research has provided a comprehensive insight of the deep hostility that existed between the Caribbean community and the Met during this period. However, what appears to be lacking is any in-depth study of the original causes of the deterioration in relations between the Met and London's Caribbean community during the 1950s and 1960s. It is this gap in our knowledge that the study seeks to address. As such, it provides essential new information that broadens our understanding of policing and race relations and enables us to better appreciate the later, well-documented difficulties in the relationship. The study is based upon government records, particularly those relating to the Metropolitan Police, the Home Office and the Colonial Office; *Metropolitan Police Orders* [5]; interviews with former police officers, politicians and senior officials at the Home Office, leading figures from the National Committee for Commonwealth Immigrants and

it successor, the Community Relations Commission[6]; as well as with members of the Caribbean community in London.

3 Early researchers of Caribbean life in Britain in the 1950s and 1960s invariably focused their attention on important issues of direct discrimination that adversely affected the community generally and were subsequently addressed – albeit in somewhat half-hearted fashion – by legislation relating to housing, employment, the 'colour bar' in places of public resort, and the provision of goods and services.[7] Policing was usually only mentioned, if at all, in passing[8]. Whitaker observed that racism in the police was 'scarcely perceived' in 1964[9]. As the statistics in Fig. 1 show, well over half of Britain's Caribbean community resided in London, though such information as existed on patterns of immigrant settlement in England and Wales was largely the result of government guesstimation; detailed information on patterns of black settlement not being included in census returns prior to 1971.

Fig.1: Estimate of the distribution of the black population of England and Wales in 1968[10]

Greater London	570,000
West Midlands	170,000
East Midlands	70,000
Yorks. (W. Riding)	60,000
Lancashire	35,000
Home Counties	35,000
Southern	25,000
Eastern	20,000
Wales	8,000
Other areas	60,000

4 Relations between the Met and Caribbean immigrants were initially described as good, but it was during the 1950s and 1960s that a climate developed in which both sides began to view the other in an increasingly negative and stereotypical manner; a state of affairs that has, despite the efforts of well-intentioned people on both sides, largely continued to the present day. In July 1959, almost a year after disturbances sparked by white racists at Notting Hill and two months after the racist killing of a Caribbean immigrant, Kelso Cochrane; the Met's Commissioner, Sir Joseph Simpson, visited Garnett Gordon, the Commissioner of the West Indies Federation [WIF], with the intention of establishing a working relationship. Simpson appeared to have been less motivated by a desire to enhance the cause of racial and cultural harmony than by personal and corporate self-interest. As he noted:

> My aim was to establish a channel of liaison between this office and his office so that there would be no excuse for any allegations that police had refused to co-

operate with responsible representatives of the coloured community in the various districts[11].

5 After the Federation's demise in 1961, the Met set up new links with the various West Indian High Commissions from 1963 onwards[12]. In 1968 a Community Relations Branch, A7 (1), was created at New Scotland Yard, the purpose of which was to develop closer ties with immigrant communities[13]. Throughout this period, however, the Met's concept of community relations had little in common with the public's understanding of the term. A7 (1) was predominantly established to forestall criticism of the Met's relations with immigrant communities and to further the Met's own priorities, rather than to encourage greater public participation in determining force policies.

6 Though racism cannot be disregarded as a factor in the Met's approach to Caribbean people, it is only when we examine other aspects of policing in London at this time that a more accurate picture emerges of the way the Met viewed its role and its relationship with society generally. As a result, one sees that the force's internal problems and priorities worked against the development of a closer relationship with London's residents, especially those from the Caribbean. Such problems included a long-standing isolation from, and lack of knowledge of, the wider community; the Met's entrenched view that its primary function was the prevention and detection of crime and the maintenance of public order; the reluctance of both the force and its officers to become better-informed of Caribbean customs and lifestyles; and the anomalous relationship of Metropolitan Police Commissioners vis-à-vis the Home Secretary and the Home Office Police Department, as a result of which the Commissioner largely set his own agenda for policing the capital.

7 Above all, the culture of, and subcultures within, the Met – an organisation that was obsessively inward looking – need to be considered in order to understand the way in which self-interest and discontent shaped attitudes of police officers to the people of London. For many officers, life in the Met was hugely unrewarding at this time, in terms of pay, self-esteem, and conditions of service. As a result, relations with the public were generally conducted on the basis of 'them' and 'us'. Policing in the context of the Caribbean was also significant for the way in which it influenced the expectations of immigrants as to what they might expect from British police officers. Simple procedural differences in policing custom between the West Indies and London caused a great deal of early resentment amongst Caribbean people towards the police, and, at the same time, led many police officers to believe that the Caribbean community were prone to make unjustified complaints against them.

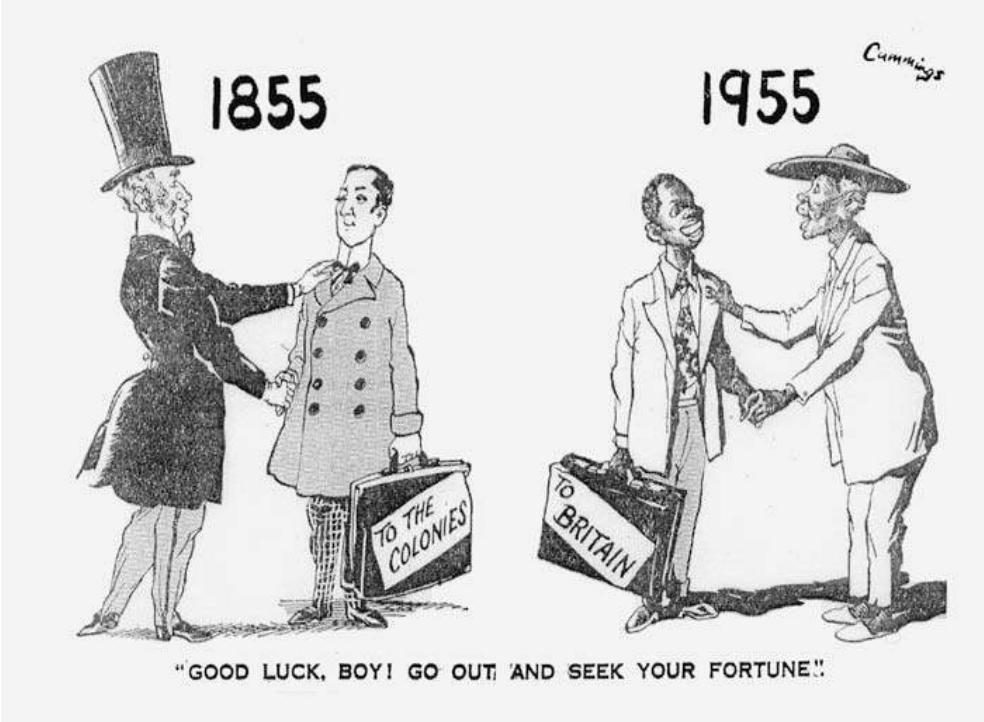
8 This research seeks to argue that racist attitudes of police officers, though an unquestionably significant factor, was merely one explanation for the Met's deteriorating relationship with the Caribbean community; and that other issues that have been largely overlooked were equally important in shaping the approach of the Met and its officers to the community it served.

Early Misconceptions and Missed Opportunities

9 Caribbean immigrants to Britain in the 1950s found that the difficulties associated with life in a new country were compounded by an education system in the West Indies that fostered notions of Britain and Britishness that were largely at odds with reality; and, once in Britain, by host community attitudes in which discrimination and racial prejudice

acted to restrict or deny opportunities to them in all aspects of life[14]. The situation was not helped by a media that, in the absence of official denials, raised indigenous community fears that Britain was being swamped by an alien black presence; and, as in the example of Cummings' 1955 cartoon (Fig. 2), gave a completely false impression of what lay in store for Caribbean immigrants; while raising host community fears that the colonised were about to exact recompense for Britain's past exploitation.

Fig.2: Cummings cartoon. *Daily Express*, 12 January 1955[15]



10 In the 1950s both police and sections of the wider society harboured misguided perceptions of the Caribbean males' 'alien' lifestyle, which tended to focus on his assumed potential to corrupt standards of decency and morality: such notions often stemming from a belief that unbridled black male sexuality would inevitably lead to the moral depravation of white women. Gilroy noted the way in which such fears shaped white attitudes to the black, in particular the Caribbean, community during this period:

> Race was thus fixed in a matrix of squalor and that of sordid sexuality. In this context, miscegenation, which captured the descent of white womanhood and recast it as a signifier of the social problems associated with the black presence emerged ahead of crime as a theme in the popular politics of immigration control[16].

11 As most of the early Caribbean immigrants were men, women not arriving in significant numbers until the mid-1950s, it naturally followed that there would be romantic and sexual relations between black men and white women. This had a double impact on white attitudes. Firstly, as Richmond noted, 'it provoked intense prejudice against West Indian men'[17]; secondly, it was seen by many in the host community to confirm the belief that their female companions were women of low moral standards or prostitutes. As a result, Caribbean men became associated in the minds of many people with the vice trade and living on immoral earnings.

12 In the early-1950s the Met, at the behest of the Home Office, began compiling reports on the activities of Caribbean immigrants[18]. It was widely recognised that black people had great difficulty in obtaining anything other than the lowest standard of accommodation. The government feared that any measures taken to re-house slum-dwelling Caribbean immigrants would be seen by the indigenous community as preferential treatment and decided that the wisest course was to ignore the problem[19]. This ensured that large numbers of Caribbean people found themselves trapped in the capital's traditionally most troublesome and deprived areas. In spite of this, the Met's reports suggested that the Caribbean community was generally law-abiding.

13 A particular frustration for immigrants from the West Indies was the Met's policy in relation to minor assaults and housing disputes. In London, police involvement in black/white neighbour disputes and domestic disturbances was largely confined to dealing with common assaults and threats of violence that stemmed from disagreements between black and white tenants and/or property owners. This invariably resulted in police, in the absence of more serious offences being disclosed, referring aggrieved parties to rent tribunals, courts or solicitors. Neighbour disputes and common assaults were the, so called, 'civil matters' or 'domestics' that the Met had traditionally sought to distance itself from; arguing that as it had limited, and in some cases no power to prosecute in such matters it should refer complainants to others who may be able to help. In the Caribbean, police officers – particularly in rural areas – fulfilled a quasi-judicial role and acted as arbitrators in neighbour disputes[20]. Many West Indian immigrants accustomed as they had been in their homelands to obtaining and acting upon the advice of police on such issues, interpreted what appeared to them to be the unwillingness to help of the British police as a distinct lack of interest in their wellbeing.

14 In July 1959, the West Indies Federation [WIF], concerned at what it believed to be the worsening state of relations between Caribbean immigrants and police in London, approached Simpson, the Metropolitan Police Commissioner, and suggested that relations might improve if police officers received training in aspects of West Indian life and culture. The Commissioner was not at all receptive to the idea and reported that:

> I explained that this was very difficult and that it would have to be for me to decide how best to carry out any agreed improvement in understanding of the problem by police. For the moment I do not propose to do more than to let them tell me ... the sort of thing they want to get over. I can then decide how best, if at all, to get them over[21].

15 The Commissioner's attitude towards Caribbean people was set out in his observations following his meeting with the WIF Commissioner and his staff, and clearly shows that he shared the prejudices of many in the host community:

> All three of them acknowledged the sort of weaknesses and defect which we experience in coloured people and above all, deplored the circulation of rumours and the making of allegations which are unsupported by reasonable, if any, evidence... He [the WIF Commissioner] appreciates too; the coloured person may resent good advice, even reasonably given, due to an inferiority complex or to criminal or unpleasant traits in the character of the person spoken to[22].

16 On 9 September 1959 the WIF Commissioner again emphasised the willingness of his staff to give talks to Metropolitan Police officers, and added that he could also provide films that would enable officers to learn more about life in the West Indies. His offer was declined and, with the subsequent demise of the West Indian Federation, any thought of raising the level of racial awareness among London's policemen was placed on hold[23]. In

spite of warnings from leaders of the capital's Caribbean community of deteriorating relations between immigrants and police, the liaison arrangement that had been put in place during the life of the West Indies Federation was allowed to disintegrate with the Federation's dissolution in 1961. Had the Met worked to re-establish links, this time with the various High Commissions in the immediate post-WIF period, it would undoubtedly have been better informed as to the state of relations between Caribbean immigrants and its officers. The Met finally began racial awareness training in late-1964, five years after it had first been offered; five years in which relations between police and immigrants had noticeably deteriorated.

17 Race relations training in the Met suffered because the training programme for new recruits was too congested and students were under intense pressure to obtain examination passes in the various stages of their course. One half-hour talk on 'social issues' that did not form part of the examination syllabus was unlikely to be seen by recruits as of vital importance. The low priority of the subject can be gleaned from the Home Office's observation that 'Race relations training must be balanced in relation to the many other equally important subjects that have to be taught'[24]. A major flaw in the Met's training was that the trainers lacked credibility. They were general trainers, who had no special commitment to raising levels of racial awareness, neither were they required to possess a deep understanding of the subject. Their priority was to get recruits through examinations in policing subjects. Worse still was the fact that, when recruits returned for further training in the latter half of their probationary period, it was found that the majority had developed negative attitudes to the subject. A recruit from the 1960s recalled his experience of the Met's racial awareness training:

> My introduction to ethnic minority training was a sergeant. He said, "Well look, if it's a gang of blacks you'll always find that one is the boss man. So find out who the boss man is and go up to him and tell him what you want the others to do and they'll all do it"[25].

18 In 1960 the Met carried out a study of relations between 'white and coloured persons'. Reports on the Brixton Sub-Division suggested that there was a low risk of racial tension in the area. However, the Met's strategy for combating racial tension involved targeted patrols of black areas – including the use of police dogs – and the dispersal of black or white people from the streets. The local chief superintendent reported that:

> The coloured population in Brixton, apart from their club and gaming activities (a small percentage only are involved), are fairly well behaved, and provided we can keep the younger irresponsible white element away from the coloured areas racial disorder will be prevented[26].

19 The Met's strategy for preventing the rise of racial tension failed to differentiate between 'irresponsible' young whites and black men who, as was their tradition in the Caribbean, congregated on street corners to hang out with their friends. If, as the Met claimed, racial disorder could be prevented by keeping the 'younger irresponsible white element away from the coloured areas', it is highly likely that a tactic of moving along 'well behaved' blacks from their own areas and subjecting them to the same treatment as intending white troublemakers was a recipe for resentment. A former Metropolitan Police Commissioner, Sir Peter Imbert believed that police tactics in dealing with West Indians at this time were largely the result of ignorance:

> It's often been said that the young Caribbean youth had a street culture whereas the indigenous youth didn't have a street culture in quite the same way. I think that we in the police didn't understand that. When we saw black youth hanging around

> street corners we couldn't understand why. We automatically thought, quite wrongly of course, on every occasion, that they were up to no good. But that was because of a lack of understanding of their culture and their way of life[27].

20 In the period prior to the enactment of the Race Relations Act 1965, many Caribbean people found that they were refused admission to, or service in, places of public resort, such as pubs and clubs. Senior Met officers appeared to have little understanding of the plight of victims of such discrimination; the Commander of No.1 Area, reporting in 1964 that:

> It is pertinent to point out that the ordinary white citizen generally accepts his place in society and makes no attempt to gatecrash places where he would not only feel out of place but is clearly unwelcome. Coloured people do not have the ability to do this and for the most part they are hypersensitive over colour[28].

21 The result was that Caribbean social gatherings were often conducted on private premises or in their own, frequently unlicensed, clubs. The Met's policy of carrying out repeated raids on these clubs and parties, frequented as they were by patrons with virtually nowhere else to go, was almost guaranteed to provoke feelings of hostility towards the police; particularly as officers in charge of such raids were not averse to looking beyond any breaches of the licensing or drug laws to justify their actions. As a former assistant commissioner recalled:

> One of the best cop-outs you could do was if you raided [Caribbean club] premises and you couldn't do them criminally was to tell the Inland Revenue about them because they didn't know they existed. The Inland Revenue was a useful backdrop if all else failed[29].

22 The lack of knowledge of the Met and its officers of Caribbean customs and lifestyles was to be a vital element in the failure of subsequent policing policies and strategies.

Autonomy, Isolation and Self-Interest

23 Part of the Met's difficulty in understanding the problems of the community in which it worked stemmed from the anomalous relationship between the Metropolitan Police Commissioner and the Home Secretary. Outside London, Police Authorities in County areas, and Watch Committees in Boroughs ensured that police were accountable to their local communities. In the capital the position was uniquely different. The Police Authority for the Metropolitan Police District was the Home Secretary, a politician whose own constituency may well have been at the other end of the country, and who was responsible for other potential political minefields such as immigration and the prison service. London's Boroughs and their elected representatives had no say in the way the capital was policed.

24 In 1964, the Home Office produced a confidential report entitled 'The Secretary of State's role in relation to the Metropolitan Police'[30]. It indicated that 'the Home Secretary's relationship with the Met was far from clear', and that difficulties in liaison lay in three key areas. Firstly, it was common for major decisions to be taken at Scotland Yard without prior Home Office consultation. Secondly, the Home Office did not know enough about the requirements of operational policing to enable it to operate as efficiently as it should; and lastly, Scotland Yard's internal machinery was cumbersome, sometimes ill co-ordinated, and, worst of all, the outlook of those at the Yard 'tended to be excessively

conservative and hostile to new ideas'[31]. As if to echo these points, Sir Robert Mark recalled that when he joined the Met in 1966:

> The whole organisation was uncoordinated to a remarkable extent. There was only a nominal pretence of democratic management. The Commissioner exercised unchallenged authority[32].

25 A major problem in the post-war period, and one that would plague the Met for decades was that of under manning in a period of year on year rising crime. In 1938, London had 18,511 police officers and the Metropolitan Police was six per cent under strength. By 1958, the year of the racial disturbances at Notting Hill, the number of officers had fallen to 16,661. The problem continued, with periodic peaks and troughs, and by 1966 the Met had a mere 11,689 constables available for beat and patrol duties, an average deficiency spread over all ranks in the beat and patrol establishments of forty-eight percent[33]. The shortage of officers meant that tackling traditional primary objectives – catching crooks and preventing crime – left little or no time for developing links with the community. Though the Met appointed Community Liaison Officers [CLOs] their work was largely devalued by the activities of their colleagues where it really mattered, at street level.

26 Between November 1969 and March 1970 the Met conducted an internal inquiry into its community relations policies[34]. A number of serious failures to develop dialogue with Londoners were discovered. These included a traditional reluctance to engage with the community other than on the basis of enforcing law and order; recognition that the Met's 'good working relationship' with the public was at times 'more apparent than real'; and that the spread of high-rise dwellings had further reduced the possibility of positive contact with the public. The report noted that:

> In so far as the police are concerned, many complain that the community isolates them and they find this detrimental to their professional and personal lives... The non-participation of police in community matters and the past prohibition of the individual police officer from participating in many ordinary community and social activities indicates that it is not the community which has isolated the police but the police who have chosen to adopt that position[35].

27 Interviews with a number of police officers on the specific subject of race relations were carried out. The majority view was that black people were the architects of their own misfortune because of their tendency to 'behave awkwardly and aggressively when approached'. The report suggested that the concept of community and police relations was 'compounded by a lack of knowledge of the subject by police; there was a reluctance to change; a fear of dealing with issues for which [police] did not have a great deal of sympathy or understanding; a blinkered view in which the police function was seen purely in terms of 'law enforcement'; and a reluctance to see any benefit in what were regarded as social work matters like community relations'[36].

28 The 1970 finding showed how little police attitudes had changed towards the public, as an officer who joined the Met in 1960 recalled:

> I'd just come out of the army and it [the Met] was a very military organisation, based loosely on a sort of military discipline. It had little contact with the community as a whole. You went out and you did your job; you arrested people, you reported people, but that's as far as it went. You didn't get involved, and if you did get involved with people you were looked at askance. They thought you were rather odd[37].

29 In 1970, the Met, at both an organisational and individual level, was still characterised by old-fashioned concepts of policing and a reluctance to engage with the people of London,

especially those such as the Caribbean community, for whom it 'did not have a great deal of sympathy or understanding.' Who then did Metropolitan Police officers understand and sympathise with? The evidence would suggest that, as far as the police were concerned, the most hard-done-by group in society were police officers themselves.

30 The Basil Dearden film, *The Blue Lamp*, which was made in 1949 and released a year later, gave something of an insight into this aspect of police culture. Early in the film, Mrs Dixon greets young Andy Mitchell, the new Metropolitan Police recruit, after her husband, George, had invited Andy home for dinner.

> Mrs Dixon (to Andy): Well, how do you like being a policeman?
> Andy: Oh – mustn't grumble.
> Mrs. Dixon: If you're a real copper, you'll never stop grumbling. Leastways, George never has these last twenty years.

31 While George may have been a less than ideal husband, our experience of him once he had been resurrected from the dead to pound the beat around Dock Green nick[38], suggests that he was a rather amiable character, and that there must have been other reasons why he never stopped grumbling.

32 Police work provided constables with a great deal that was routine, menial and unpleasant, interspersed with occasional moments of danger, high drama and excitement. A close bond existed between the officers themselves, though even here there was misunderstanding and occasional friction between a generation of post-war entrants who had previously served in the armed forces and recruits who, from the early-1960s, had no service background and were less prepared to accept service-style discipline. In a 1965 memo to the Commissioner, the Assistant Commissioner 'A' Department[39] noted that:

> The [Police] Federation claimed that man-management, or rather the lack of it, was the primary cause for resignations... the status of sergeants was low... often being only known by their numbers rather than their names... the service had to accept that new, younger officers were less willing to put up with old ideas on discipline and accept old-fashioned standards and values[40].

33 However, other factors came into play that made police work in London a less than appealing option. As well as a discipline code that applied both on- and off-duty, pay-rates were low. The three-month shift pattern, which consisted of two months of day duties and one month of night duty, and included compulsory worked rest-days, was decidedly unattractive; and was made even worse by the requirement that night duty arresting officers attend court the following day with their prisoner(s), followed later the same day by another tour of night duty[41]. Not surprisingly wastage rates were extremely high. The Commissioner's Annual Report for 1965 indicated that premature wastage represented over 40% of the Met's annual intake of recruits[42].

34 An added irritant for London officers was the fact that they were always likely to have their few weekends off disrupted by one or more of the Met's numerous public order commitments, which regularly included sporting events, political demonstrations and marches in support of various causes. Low pay meant that over 60% of officers and their families lived in flats or houses provided by the Met, some even residing in married quarters above police stations, while most single officers were billeted in police section houses. This practice tended to ensure that, for some police officers and their families, both on- and off-duty time was spent in a police environment.

35 Other restrictions on an officer's private life meant that police officers were forbidden from taking an active part in politics and getting into debt. Permission was required, not only to live in property not provided by the police, but was also required to marry the partner of one's choice. In the mid-1960s, London weighting of £20 per annum did nothing to aid recruitment to the Met, or to deter its officers from adding to the capital's policing deficiency by transferring to police forces in more pleasant parts of the country where the pressure of work was less and house prices were more affordable. In short, most police officers believed that they performed a difficult job that set them apart from the rest of society and for which they received scant financial reward and recognition. These feelings of alienation could be, and often were, also directed towards higher ranks in the police, particularly those who no longer worked anti-social hours, and who, as a survey of junior ranking officers in Liverpool and Manchester showed, were considered to inhabit 'ivory towers'[43].

36 In February 1965, the Met's Research and Planning Unit presented the result of a study into the supervision by duty officers and section sergeants of police constables[44]. It was found that the amount of time spent by duty officers and section sergeants in dealing with paperwork had increased dramatically over the course of the preceding ten to fifteen years and, as a result, they tended to spend too little of their time in supervising and directing the constables. When looking at the role of superintendents and chief inspectors it was found that they also spent too much time dealing with paperwork. The report noted that:

> ... A situation seemed to exist where [superintendents and chief inspectors] were preoccupied with paperwork, often of a routine nature, to the exclusion of personal supervision, proper contact with the men and the conception of fresh ideas and plans for combating the problems of their area[45].

37 What one sees is a situation in which Metropolitan Police constables were receiving little in the way of leadership and support from every supervisory rank from sergeant to superintendent. The result was that, at a time when the Met was seriously undermanned and wastage rates were extremely high, a sizeable percentage of junior ranking officers who chose to remain became deeply frustrated with their senior officers; a number of whom were regarded as being out of touch with the difficulties that were being encountered at street level.

38 Between October 1967 and January 1968 the Home Office conducted a survey among 3,075 police officers from constable to chief superintendent rank in England, Scotland and Wales[46]. The results revealed that almost one officer in five of constables and sergeants who expressed satisfaction with policing had seriously considered resigning from the police service. Almost 50% of those who were fairly dissatisfied, and over 80% of those who claimed to be very dissatisfied, had seriously considered leaving the police. However, the figures also revealed that over 90% of those who were fairly dissatisfied, and 75% of constables and sergeants who were very dissatisfied with police work stated that they would probably remain in the police until they could collect their pensions. Of the constables and sergeants surveyed, 2,125 (just over 80%), described themselves as fairly dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied with their job.

39 This suggests that a great many policemen at the operational end of the service felt unfulfilled in their chosen occupation but were prepared to soldier on for anything up to thirty years in order to collect their pensions[47]. It also begs the questions: how would such dissatisfied individuals, possessed as they were of powers to arrest and prosecute, behave

towards the community they policed, particularly when faced by confrontational and challenging situations or individuals: and, why, when pay and conditions of service were so bad, was there not open revolt amongst the police rank and file? The ultra-conservatism of the police and the service background of the majority of officers would have worked against notions of militancy, as would the disastrous lessons of the police strike in 1919, when all of those who took part lost their jobs. There were, however, other factors that kept resentment within manageable proportions.

40 Firstly, while senior officers generally lacked innovative leadership qualities, they were all men who had come through the system and had shared the same frustrations as the junior ranks. As a result, they often made up for inadequacies in man-management by a generosity when it came to welfare matters. One officer recalled the way his family was dealt with after he was seriously assaulted on duty:

> When [I was] originally injured the superintendent had my wife brought to the hospital. She had a car each time she wanted to visit me. Anything she wanted she phoned the nick and she had immediately the ear of the duty officer. Nothing was ever too much trouble. I was raised in the job to work and play hard. If the wheel came off then up went the defensive walls from the top down. Comradeship was paramount. The job came first[48].

41 Secondly, senior officers turned something of a blind-eye to certain long-established malpractices. These included such time-honoured traditions as the 'golden hook' and 'mumping' and 'blagging'[49]. Such practices merely emphasised the lack of adequate supervision and the resulting latitude this gave to the junior ranks to operate as they saw fit. The third saving grace for Met officers was that only a tiny minority of complaints made against them were ever found by investigating officers to have been substantiated.

42 On 1 September 1968, the *Observer*, in an article entitled 'Police brush up their race relations', reported that police were complaining that discrimination was working in favour of immigrants because policemen were fearful of complaints. Such concerns, however, had little basis in fact. Figures for complaints by black people against Met officers for the year 1 April 1962 to 31 March 1963 revealed that of 122 complaints only 6 were substantiated[50]. General complaint figures for 1968 show that of 909 allegations of offences committed by Met officers, excluding traffic offences, 12 (a mere 1.3%) were substantiated[51]. In the case of specific allegations of racial discrimination by Met officers for 1969, of 41 complaints, none were substantiated[52].

The Origins of Institutional Racism

43 A consideration of the Metropolitan Police in the broader context of society as a whole in the 1950s and 1960s would suggest that the Met was a reflection of an indigenous community that was itself largely racist. The Met's problem was that it upheld the values of the white racist society of which it was part, yet its front-line role brought it into direct contact with those considered to be alien black outsiders; people who sought the Met's help to challenge the very values that the police were seen to embody and sustain. The tough line that was often taken by police in the colonies in order to suppress challenges to its authority was, though less severely, mirrored on the streets of London. While the social elite in the colonies sided with the police to maintain the *status quo* and control the majority population, in Britain the working-class was largely compliant in its own subjection. Early Caribbean immigrants, a number of whom were aware of police

partiality and oppression in their own countries, may well have been predisposed to see policing in negative and repressive terms once in Britain. They were not prepared for the position of second-class citizenship that awaited them in England; neither did they understand the written and unwritten rules of the game by which the British police and society operated. As such, those from the West Indies were at a disadvantage, as Studlar points out:Major and influential segments of British society deny that social equality is a desirable goal. Since British political culture only partially supports the value of equality, it is not surprising that appeals on racial issues directed towards this value are ignored[53].

44 Early problems in the relationship between the Met and Caribbean immigrants stemmed from the force's ignorance of Caribbean cultures and a misunderstanding amongst immigrants as to police powers and practices in Britain. The Met crucially failed to take advantage of racial awareness training for a five-year period during which time relations grew ever worse. The principal architect of this failure was Sir Joseph Simpson, the Met's Commissioner. The inability of the Home Secretary to adequately supervise the Commissioner meant that he was largely autonomous. Given a *de facto* free hand, Simpson allowed his unenlightened views on race to impede progress in this critical area, as well as in his reluctance to recruit black police officers.

45 The Met's self-imposed alienation from the community it served was compounded by a belief at all levels of the force that its sole priorities were the prevention and detection of crime and maintaining public order. The increase in motorised police patrolling in the 1960s meant that what was already a low level of community contact with the public was reduced still further. As a result, many police officers saw their role in stark, black and white terms. A retired chief superintendent recalled the prevailing philosophy of his colleagues towards the public at the time:

> Thinking back, it was almost as though we were at war. Providing the public behaved itself and didn't come into contact with us then by and large that was OK. But if they did...then woe betide them. Nobody actually escaped the police in those days. We would report hundreds, if not thousands, of motorists and at night, certainly Friday and Saturday nights, we'd be out hunting youngsters who'd had a few pints... There was no concept at all of customer care. When people came to the [station] counter they waited... they weren't customers. They were people with problems and you had more than enough problems to deal with[54].

46 The Met became ever more guarded with the mass increase in television ownership from the mid-1950s, and the growing willingness of the media to discuss controversial issues such as police corruption. Coupled with this was the appearance of a new criminal class – the middle class – whose ever-increasing use of the motor car and direct involvement in single-issue politics, such as 'Ban the Bomb' and the anti-apartheid movement, brought the Met into contact for the first time with potential defendants who, unlike its traditional customers – the working class – had access to the most persuasive legal advocates and the ear of politicians. In a changing society, the Met's hostility to its own reform was never more apparent than in its dealings with London's Caribbean community. An example of this is to be found in the Met's response to questions posed by the Select Committee on Race Relations and Immigration in December 1968[55].

47 The Met claimed that the police would always like to do more to keep in touch with immigrant communities, but they also had a large number of responsibilities that needed to be considered before any one aspect of policing could be prioritised. It had to be borne in mind that the primary task of the police was the preservation of the peace by preventing and detecting crime. Allegations of discrimination by black people against the

police were, it argued, largely the result of their over-sensitivity and were not supported by evidence. In any event, the Met claimed, young people and the Irish 'have more to put up with from police activity in the pursuit of criminal offenders and the maintenance of order than coloured persons'[56]. Many of the difficulties in relations between police and immigrants were, it was alleged, the result of a failure of the latter to adjust to a lifestyle that was in keeping with British ideas of reserve and decorum. The essence of the Met's response was crystal clear. If change was needed, it was others who would need to make that change, not the Met.

48 As an organisation, the force simply did not understand, or know enough about the community it served: a point that was graphically illustrated in its use of heavy-handed policing to 'protect' the generally law-abiding Caribbean community in Brixton from white racists in 1960. The Met's ultra-conservative leadership, hostile as it was to new ideas, was not helped by middle ranking officers, who appear to have spent too much of their time in offices dealing with routine paperwork. This left the constables, a largely demoralised, under-strength and overworked body of officers who lacked adequate supervision and guidance, and who were preoccupied with concerns over low pay and outdated conditions of service, as the force's primary link with the community. At a time when the Met measured success in terms of numbers of arrests and prosecutions, empathy with, and concerns for the welfare of a minority community in London such as those from the Caribbean, would appear to have been unlikely. The Met's prevailing philosophy towards the public was summed up by one of the force's first Asian officers:

> As far as the public was concerned it was them – animals, and us, and any small little thing bring them in. So it was more bums on seats. That was the thing. The more people you bring in, it doesn't really matter what for, that's it, you bring them in[57].

49 Those seeking to raise cultural and racial awareness in the force were seen as meddlers, and community relations was regarded as a distraction from the Met's real business of catching crooks and preventing crime. Ignorance of the community bred an insularity in which the Met's own problems and priorities were always the most important. As a result, the significant aggravating factor of racism in everyday policing situations, such as common assaults and disputes was never recognised. Neither was the potential goodwill that would have undoubtedly ensued from the Caribbean community had the Met availed itself of the opportunities offered to develop greater cultural awareness of West Indian lifestyles when the opportunity presented itself in the late 1950s. Neither the Met nor the Home Office appear to have regarded race relations as a vitally important aspect of police training in the period. For the Metropolitan Police, the development of good relations with London's Caribbean immigrants simply wasn't sufficiently important to receive priority status. Addressing an audience of West Indian students in March 1966, the Met's then officer with special responsibility for West Indian affairs, chief superintendent Norman, informed his audience that:

> ... Someone has to be the boss on the streets and give the orders. Police naturally resented having every order questioned... it would make for better relations if immigrants were prepared to accept advice or orders more readily[58].

50 The clear implication of such a statement is that relations between the Met and the Caribbean community would improve when the latter understood that they must obey a policeman's advice or orders without question. Such an observation, coming as it did from an officer who was then the Met's principal liaison officer with the West Indian community, merely emphasises the force's lack of awareness and sensitivity to race and

ethnicity. The foundations for later conflict and resentment between the Met and London's Caribbean community were clearly already in place by the end of the 1960s.

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NOTES

2. Bowling (1998, pp. 294-298).
3. See Smith, Gray (1985, p. 390); and Gilroy (1987, pp. 88-113).
4. See for example Holdaway (1996, pp. 25-28).
5. A twice-weekly publication giving information on policy and personnel matters within the Met.
6. Which was itself replaced by the Commission for Racial Equality in 1976.
7. Race Relations Acts of 1965 and 1968.
8. See for example, Patterson (1963, p. 88); and Richmond (1954, pp. 88, 99, 102, 113).
9. Whitaker (1964, pp. 147, 100-102); and Emsley (1996, p. 178).
10. PRO HO376/140. Ministerial Committee on Immigration and Assimilation 1968, report dated 22 March 1968. The majority of Caribbean people living in London at this time were resident in the inner London Boroughs of Stoke Newington, Hackney, Paddington, Kensington (North) and Lambeth. See Davidson (1963, p. 64).

11. PRO MEPO2/9854 Metropolitan Police liaison with the West Indian community 1959-1968.
12. The first of such arrangements being made with the Jamaican High Commission.
13. A7 Branch was divided into Community Relations A7 (1), and Children and Young Persons A7 (2).
14. See in particular Collins (2001, pp. 391-418).
15. PRO CAB124/1192 Proposal to restrict the right of British subjects from overseas to enter and remain in the United Kingdom. (Cartoon reproduced with kind permission of Express Newspapers).
16. Gilroy (1987, p. 80).
17. Richmond (1954, p. 77).
18. PRO MEPO2/9047 Reports on settlement of Commonwealth immigrants in London Boroughs 1949-1952.
19. PRO CAB134/1466 Cabinet Committee Report 6 June 1957.
20. Some police officers in the Caribbean were even appointed as Justices of the Peace.
21. MEPO 2/9854.
22. PRO MEPO2/9854.
23. *Ibid.*
24. PRO HO287/1455 Working Party on police training in race relations: minutes 1970.
25. Former chief inspector, interviewed by author 23 November 2000.
26. PRO MEPO2/9992 Disturbances involving coloured persons in London: Metropolitan Police reports on incidents 1960-1961.
27. Sir Peter Imbert, interviewed by author 20 February 2002.
28. PRO MEPO2/10489 The Metropolitan Police response to the Race Relations Act 1965. The term 'coloured' was commonly used at this time to refer to those who where members of the non-white population.
29. Interviewed by author, 24 July 2000.
30. PRO HO287/25 Relationship between the Metropolitan Police and the Home Secretary, formation of a Committee to ensure closer relationship 1961-1969.
31. *Ibid.*
32. Mark (1978, p. 82).
33. PRO HO 287/ 250 Operational control of colonial police forces: policy on policing in the colonies 1956. Report by F.1 Division, Home Office, 3 January 1967.
34. PRO MEPO28/9 A7 Branch report: Police-Community Relations Project 01/01/1970 – 31/12/1971, The authors of the report were woman chief superintendent K. Skillern and inspector E. Mitchell.
35. *Ibid.*
36. *Ibid.*
37. Former Met inspector, interviewed by author 15 January 2001.
38. PRO MEPO2/8342 *The Blue Lamp* script. PC Dixon was murdered in *The Blue Lamp*. Many people saw his amiable, quietly efficient character as the idealised representation of a British policeman. This resulted in the character of PC Dixon, again played by Jack Warner, being re-created for the BBC television series, *Dixon of Dock Green*, which ran from 1955 for 22 years. The 'nick' is a colloquial term used to describe a police station or prison, and was often used to inform a person that he/she is being arrested; for example, 'You're nicked'. In the TV series Dixon was promoted twice, from constable to sergeant, and from sergeant to the now defunct rank of station sergeant. For a more detailed study of police representation in films and television, see Sydney-Smith (2002).
39. The four main central departments at Scotland Yard at this time were 'A', which dealt with operations; 'B', dealing with traffic and technical support; 'C', which dealt with criminal investigation; and 'D', which was responsible for personnel and training.

40. PRO MEPO2/10834 Police Federation Memorandum: The problem outlining deficiencies in manpower and equipment: response by the Superintendents' Association: the Commissioner's observations and liaison with the Home Office 1964-1966.
41. It has always been notoriously difficult, often because of the unwillingness of the officers themselves, to change shift patterns in the police. Even today, many shift-working Met officers will finish a week of night duty at 06.00 and will report back on duty for late turn at 14.00 the same day.
42. PRO MEPO4/213 Annual Report of the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis 1965.
43. PRO HO377/43 Pilot experiment on premature wastage of officers from the police service 1967.
44. PRO MEOP2/10434, Commissioner's Conference 1965. Duty officers were invariably those of inspector rank. At this time sergeants in Metropolitan Police stations were either designated as section sergeants, those whose job it was to patrol and supervise constables; or station officer, who was responsible for dealing with all persons arrested and brought to the station, and for dealing with callers at the station office counter.
45. *Ibid.*
46. PRO HO377/85 Police Planning Organisation – Man Management Survey.
47. An officer who joined the police in the 1950s could retire on half-pay pension after completing 25 years service. In the 1960s this was raised to 30 years, after which time an officer could retire on two-thirds of salary. Age limit for those in the ranks of constable to chief superintendent was 55, though annual extensions of service were frequently granted.
48. Letter to author 3 January 2001.
49. The golden hook was a gratuity paid by tow-away companies when called by police to remove damaged vehicles following road traffic accidents. Mumping and blagging were terms used to describe the practice of some officers of getting something for nothing, or at a greatly reduced price, because the recipient was a police officer. Home beat officers and the CID were considered to be the best mumpers and blaggers. 'Blagging' is also a term used to refer to a robbery. A person committing a robbery with a firearm would be commonly referred to as an armed blagger.
50. PRO MEPO2/9854.
51. PRO MEPO2/10790.
52. PRO MEPO2/10791.
53. Studlar (1976, p. 114).
54. Interviewed by author, 21 November 2000.
55. HO376/159 Select Committee on Race Relations and Immigration 1969.
56. *Ibid.*
57. Ex inspector, interviewed by author, 20 November 2001.
58. PRO MEPO 2/10433 Commissioner's Conferences, notes and minutes, 1964.

ABSTRACTS

This article argues that current knowledge of the origins of the difficulties in relations between the Metropolitan Police and London's Caribbean community has tended to over-emphasise the significance, and political repercussions, of the confrontational and violent clashes that occurred

in the 1970s and 1980s at Notting Hill, Brixton and Tottenham. It suggests that in the 1950s and 1960s serious problems in the relationship were already apparent; and that an understanding of the way in which such difficulties shaped attitudes on both sides is essential if later events are to be viewed in their proper context. It is this deficiency that the article seeks to address.

Cet article développe l'idée que les recherches actuelles sur l'origine des difficultés qui existent dans les relations entre la police de Londres et la communauté caribéenne qui réside dans la capitale, exagèrent l'importance et les répercussions politiques des heurts violents qui se sont produits dans les années1970-1980 à Nothing Hill, Brixton et Tottenham. Il suggère au contraire que ces relations étaient déjà très problématiques dans les années 1950-1960 et qu'il faut comprendre l'impact de ces difficultés sur les attitudes de part et d'autre pour saisir le véritable contexte des événements plus récents. Le présent article s'y emploie.

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